World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 710

GUESTS: **JULIA T. ALVAREZ**
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WORLD'S GRAYING POPULATION

The growth of the global older population, citizens who are living longer productive lives, will be one of the most challenging demographic trends of the 21st century. The total number of persons aged 60 and above is projected to reach 600 million by the year 2001 and 1.2 billion by 2025. More than 70% of them will be living in developing countries. To draw attention to this trend, the United Nations declared 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. In a special World Chronicle programme, three guests -- Ambassador Julia T. Alvarez, Dr. Aliye Pekin Celik and Professor Dianne Davis, discuss issues affecting the elderly worldwide.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:02
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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's World Chronicle.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle.**

Some people would argue that the world is getting greener. The fact is, the world's population is getting grayer. In the next forty years, 1.4 billion people will be 60 and over and 70 percent of the global population will be living in urban areas. With these trends in mind, the United Nations General Assembly decided to observe 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. In today's special World Chronicle programme, we will discuss how it is to grow old in the city.

Our guests today are three experts on the subject. They are: the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations, Julia T. Alvarez, who is concurrently the Dominican Republic's Chief Representative at the UN Commission for Social Development; Mrs. Aliye Pekin Celik from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements; and Professor Dianne Davis, founder of the NGO International Council for Caring Communities. Ladies welcome to **World Chronicle.**

I see that the logo of the 1999 Commemorative Year says: 'towards a society for all ages.' The fact of the matter is, it seems to me that older people are rather looked down upon by the younger members of our society, particularly in the West. Perhaps in the Orient, there is greater respect for older people but in the West, it seems to be a tendency to want to cast the old folks aside and take the position that they've been around long enough and it's time to make way for the younger generations. Is this a problem that you think will be addressed during the special Year? Anybody would like to comment on that?

ALVAREZ: Yes, I think that would be a main issue in the year because as you have told us, there is a tendency in modern society to look at older persons as a, perhaps, having had their day and they are mostly invisible or they are looked down upon and I think I've often wondered why that is and I think that there are so many older persons today compared to what there were in the past. We have -- the United Nations has determined that we have added from 20 to 30 years to human life span during the century and this a phenomenon that is of occurrence and I think that people -- because they tend to look at older persons as a problem and not a solution that they wonder what kind of problems are they going to create for society?

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Alvarez, you're from a country of Latin America. What culturally is the attitude of Latin Americans, by and large, to the elderly? Do they

nurture them or do they despise them?

ALVAREZ: No, I would say that we, traditionally, have respected older persons. Of course, that is changing. I think the fact that the world is getting smaller and that we have so many social problems, has tended to fragment society and that older persons do not have the respect that they used to have in the past. That is changing.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Celik, you are involved with human settlements and in our introduction, we spoke about the problems of older people in large communities a conglomerate -- what you call it now agglomerations, I think -- can you talk about that?

CELIK: Of course. As you know, the world is urbanizing at an unprecedented rate. For that reason, the number of cities are increasing and also the populations in the urban areas are increasing. By the year 2000, most of the humanity will be living in urban areas -- half of the humanity -- and by the year 2030, there will be two times more people in urban areas as compared to rural areas. But these urban areas have problems of their own as we have seen in the -- and discussed in the Habitat II Conference. These urban areas have problems because of the ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Habitat II Conference was the conference on human settlements.

CELIK: Absolutely. Because of the rate of urbanization and the lack of resources that are allocated to the urban areas, most of the people living in urban areas do not have adequate shelter, they don't have access to infrastructure, transportation and energy. Therefore, in many cities almost 30-40 percent of the population live, especially in developing countries of course, in squatter areas and of course, there are many older persons in these areas and they suffer as much as the younger people and they suffer more. But the Habitat II Conference is advising certain things to be done to improve the conditions for the overall population and for the older people as well and this are not so, sometimes, very difficult solutions. They might be very easy solutions, but one has to think about them -- the planners, the organizers -- have to think about these problems and bring solutions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Coming back to cultural attitudes, you are from Turkey, I believe. What is the attitude of Turkish society toward the elderly?

CELIK: So far, the Turkish society have a very positive approach to the elderly and we were just checking that there are sometimes homeless children, but we have never seen homeless elderly in Turkey, but, of course, with the rapid urbanization, the conditions that they are living in are not perfect because when they live in squatter areas, for example, they don't have any access to roads or sanitation. And when it comes to being

mobile in the city, it is almost impossible for them to be very active in the city itself, because there are simple things that are missing like rails in – handrails in the public spaces or ...

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean for people with wheel chairs ...

CELIK: With wheel chairs or people who are walking slowly or who have canes so many things can be improved very easily in the urban areas to make life easier for them. I mean there are many elderly people in the city but you cannot see them as much as you see them in developed countries because their accessibility to public places is very limited. They mainly stay at home.

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Davis, tell us a bit about your International Council for Caring Communities. Is this an Organization that prevents retirement communities or is this something very different from that?

DAVIS: That was the beginning because I wrote the text on the subject. No, I think from that, we went forth to address the social, economic and cultural impact on aging on communities and to try to stimulate and showcase solutions and it's being done on a number of levels, one being mainly on educational forums. We just completed an aging and urbanization conference of which 600 attended and 43 speakers from all over the world here in the UN and also by having the next generation of students at schools of architecture and interior design work on existing communities near them and how do they perceive the changes. So I think that the object is developing a cadre of awareness for the future. It is a challenge of their issues but in reality 60 years old is not very old. It's many of us sitting around this table.

LITTLEJOHNS: Retirement age in the United Nations. In this respect, the UN is rather backward. The OECD came up with the report, not long ago I think, suggesting that the retirement age is pretty much out of whack in much of the world now and people should be allowed to work much longer than they do. Is that your feeling, too?

DAVIS: Yes, and I also feel that in planning communities, we very rarely, especially in urban places, have attics or garages of which we can stimulate enterprises when we've been retired or out of the mainstream so if we would look at buildings and later fit them as business incentives for economic development within communities in partnership a public-private partnerships with governments, then the local authorities or whatever, because with the large growing population, it can't be dependent on society – it has to contribute to society. So I think we need a creative leadership and a new look at using untapped resources – the human resource of the older person which has

wisdom, ability in society.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now when you use the term 'caring communities' – I mean – is New York City a caring community? Probably not.

DAVIS: To a certain extent, New York City is becoming a very important caring community because you have good transportation – you could get around without a car. You have intellectual stimulant by the various museums or social centres or churches that have particular religious groups that have...

LITTLEJOHNS: When you're speaking of cars, it seems that Mayor Giuliani is rather down on pedestrians at the moment.

DAVIS: I think that what we're seeing is a reversal for people wanting to come to downtown areas and the city square and some suburban areas become the shopping mall. It becomes the new city square wherever people gather.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this good for older people?

DAVIS: And it's been excellent for gathering for older people because there's an interaction of ages. It's not isolation. I think that's important.

LITTLEJOHNS: So they're not stuck in the 'bed/sitting rooms' as they call them in England where some little studio apartment or whatever they get out and socialize with all age groups? Is that the part of the ...

DAVIS: Yes, I think from the private sector point of view, if they can get them out, they began to have them integrated because the shopping centre now is the entertainment retail and interaction of the community. And they are beginning to accept the social responsibility ....

LITTLEJOHNS: But the shopping malls tend to be in suburbia rather than ...

DAVIS: But now they're coming into the cities. I'm just using that as an example of where the downtown area can be the Bryant Park if you're in the city or Central Park ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Here in New York?

DAVIS: Here in New York.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this partly, would you say, as a result of the influence of your group?

DAVIS: I would hope to say that we have some influence, but we are very young. We've only been in existence since 1994. A lot of other people have been working very hard for a long time but I think we come from another approach of working in partnership with all of those that are out there and with the UN agencies and governments

to move this forward. So I think that it's beginning to become very apparent moving into the International Year and this gives an awareness factor.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Alvarez, I believe that Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, is a city of about 2 million people ...

ALVAREZ: Close to that if not there.

LITTLEJOHNS: How are you taking care of the elderly among your citizens?

ALVAREZ: You have to realize that we are – Dominican Republic – is a developing country and it's a completely different situation from a developed country. Of course, it's very hard to sell to a politician that older persons need special programmes because our population is mainly young.

LITTLEJOHNS: 125 probably – the average, is it?

ALVAREZ: Yes, the average. It's moving up now – the aging revolution, as some people call it, is going to happen at such rapidity so it's not only the aging of population but the rapidity with which this phenomenon is happening. For example, what took France 150 years is going to happen in our country in 30. Now when you take these two phenomenon together, we don't have the resources to deal with them, then we find that we have to view older persons as a resource not as a burden, which is the view that most developed countries and younger generations tend to look at older persons as a group that you have to retire or put into nursing homes. We view them as a resource. We have to view them as a resource. When they ask me what the retirement age is in the Dominican Republic, I tell them that God retires us. Because people have to work till they die – many times.

LITTLEJOHNS: Of course, there is social security ...

ALVAREZ: Very little and only a small segment of the population.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle.** Our guests are the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations Julia T. Alvarez, who is concurrently the Dominican Republic's Chief Representative of the UN Commission for Social Development, Mrs. Aliye Pekin Celik from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and Professor Dianne Davis, founder of the NGO International Council for Caring Communities.

Mrs. Celik, since Ambassador Alvarez has spoken a bit about the economic problems of aging, would you like to talk about that? I mean, the feeling is, I think, that if you have a large segment of the population that is elderly, it's a bit of a drag on the economy of the countries. Now, what do you feel about that?

CELIK: Well, what I would like to tell you is more from the

urbanization and urban planning point of view. As you know, there are many ....

LITTLEJOHNS: That requires money, too.

CELIK: That requires money, too, absolutely. The money for that should come from the governments together with partners. The solution to that is ....

LITTLEJOHNS: From the private sector, you mean?

CELIK: From the private sector, from the Non-Governmental Organizations, from local authorities. Local authorities is a very strong resource in areas regarding urban settlements and human settlements in urban areas and they can bring the community together especially in cases where there is decentralization and where they have power, they can be very important to provide partnership. So with the partnership of the academia, non-governmental organizations, all the civil society, this burden can be solved to a great degree and there are programmes in which houses are provided together or land is provided to the poorer community so that they can build their own housing and the government has the enabling role to provide land, infrastructure, technical assistance, loan to the poor people so that they can build their own housing and in order to help the older persons, the way to go about it is, I think, by giving priority to those families who have elderly in their households so this will encourage multi-generational family living and also it will help the elderly because we have seen that those who are living alone are worse of as compared to those who are living with their families and who have the activity of looking after their grandchildren and being part of the family. So this is one of the solutions that we see.

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Davis, yours is an international organization. Could you tell us which countries are leaders in the field of developing caring communities and getting away from the segregation, if you like, of the older people.

DAVIS: There are two that come to mind – Japan, which nationally over 25 percent of their population is over the age of 60 and has had to face this reality. One, they have designed guidelines of which they have attached preferred mortgages to. So if you build within certain very modest changes various features – people who fall over steps and so forth, you can have the preferred mortgage. They also have in Kobe – have something called a multi-generation well-being park and it's up on the mountain and it has about 119 different buildings and what's unique, I believe, it has a caring hotel for caregivers, has an R & R to go, and instead of having a drugstore, it has a solution shop. And instead of just having a lecture room, it has a Japanese apartment that has been adapted for disabled old or young to be able to make it easier to take care of them. It has a third age

college, has a rehabilitation centre, and then it has a youth ....

LITTLEJOHNS: Has a what college?

DAVIS: A third age college.

LITTLEJOHNS: If you feel going back to school ...

DAVIS: ... going back to school, which is what we are all talking about. And I think one of the things coming out of it ....

LITTLEJOHNS: Is that popular? A lot of people doing it?

DAVIS: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Great.

DAVIS: People have time, they prefer to go back – it's a socialization. It's a place to go. You're learning something else. Part of the International Year will be discussing something called life cycle matting, where one doesn't go to school once, go to work, and then retire. But you go to school, work, retire, rest and then go back to school to re-train – so you're spiking through a lifespan so you're constantly being involved. And I believe ...

LITTLEJOHNS: That's Japan. What about other countries?

DAVIS: Another country is Finland and they have now what is called a barrier-free city. It's brand new. It's got 300 buildings on it ...

LITTLEJOHNS: A barrier-free city?

DAVIS: A barrier-free city – meaning that area is for all ages. You can get around whether you're in a stroller or you're in a wheelchair or just walking and it's also communicated. You can shop by telematics, it's involved with computers and health care services. So it's the city of the future. So that's one extreme and the effects of the earthquake in Japan has also made a whole development of a city that's now conscious. So I think, what's come out of what we are all discussing is the input of the older person in the planning of their cities and their communities. They can be very helpful, if asked.

LITTLEJOHNS: You were quite positive about New York City a little while ago. What about other major cities in the United States, are they in fairly good shape in this area, too?

DAVIS: Well, they vary depending on how dependent they are on the car. Once you take the keys away ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Los Angeles, for example, is entirely dependent on the car, how do they manage?

DAVIS: Public transportation becomes an issue for government. And

also they have these jitneys or small buses that sort of move people. But people are very dependent on the concept they lose dignity if they lose the keys to their car. So I think there's a whole psychological aspect to develop in the years coming forth.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Alvarez, you're the diplomat on this programme. Tell us what – government representative – tell us what you expect the International Year to achieve. Is it mainly a matter of sort of public information focussing attention on the problems of the older population? Do you expect that solutions to the problems will emerge from the Year?

ALVAREZ: Yes, I think both. We need the media and that is why I was very happy when you invited us to participate in this. Because we have to – if we want politicians to really pay attention for policies for older persons – we have to change the very negative stereotypes of older persons as a burden. When I go to my government officials to talk to them about a programme for older persons, when they see me come, they say 'here she comes again' and they say 'we cannot handle anymore problems' and I tell them, 'no, I'm coming for solutions.' For example, Dianne has talked about some countries that are developed countries and, of course, they are doing much more than we are because they have resources. But we, in developing countries, they say that 'necessity is the mother of invention' and because we're poor and we don't have the resources, sometimes we have to make do with very little. And for example, we have a programme in the Dominican Republic whereby we have brought retired teachers who have a very low pension on which they cannot live, we've trained them and brought them back to the classroom to teach younger children – pre-school or day care. And we think we pay those teachers so they're earning their salary, they feel content – they feel that they are contributors to society and human beings need this encouragement, this idea that they are needed and that they can contribute, that they are not a drain on their families or on society. So I think each country contribute in the measure that they can. Of course, we don't have many resources but there are many things that we do in a natural way. That people devise by themselves. Even the communities, they tend to organize even without knowing that this is what they're doing. They help each other and so we have caring communities which are born out of just the feeling that people have for each other – this camaraderie.

DAVIS: Caring community really is the extended family ...

ALVAREZ: Exactly.

DAVIS: ... worldwide – it's a common denominator.

ALVAREZ: I really believe that the community is going to replace, in many

cases, the families of tomorrow because the family with urbanization, with migration, a lot of people particularly in developing countries, they migrate because they're looking for a better life – economic migration and what we see in those cases is that usually the community – the people around replace the family when it's not there.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Celik we have only little time left. Would you like to sort of sum up your impression of the discussion we've had here?

CELIK: I think in discussions like that will be extremely useful up to 1999 and beyond that because the most important solution is the increase of political will to find solutions to these problems which are not really financial. I mean without spending more, without investing more in this area, much could be done with good thinking, with finding solutions, with the action of the community, local authority, family and the government working together. So we shouldn't look at the solutions where -- to find solutions where there is money. But with increase of the political will and the increase of awareness, I think the subject of older persons can be main streamed and in the year 2000, the problems will be solved.

LITTLEJOHNS: It's not something that can be solved simply by throwing money at it.

CELIK: No, I don't think so.

LITTLEJOHNS: Change of attitude.

CELIK: I think change of attitude and good thinking and innovative solutions are the most important part of this.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Davis ...

DAVIS: I would say that here at the UN, there is the international -- the NGO Committee on Aging – which has created something called creative connections and through the International Year and beyond where the NGOs will be working with governments to be able to do solutions at the local level and I think, through all of us working together, I think we'll be moving in changing the concept and the image from a negative to a positive contribution which we all can make to society.

LITTLEJOHNS: The idea of retirement communities, I asked this question earlier on, is not particularly a good one, would you say? I mean it does tend to segregate older people.

DAVIS: It segregates but it depends on what people are looking for and depends on what their backgrounds are. It's more a middle class or upper class mentality in urban society. It's a floating cruise ship – the care – and I think some of the ideas, though

can be penetrated to the larger community -- that sense of belonging that sense of caring and I think that is a positive. It prevents isolation and I think the Internet and leap frog technology is going to make a big difference in this sense.

LITTLEJOHNS: So on the whole, all three of you are pretty optimistic things are going to develop in a very positive way from this special Year?

DAVIS: Absolutely.

LITTLEJOHNS: That's all the time we have. Thanks for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guests have been the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations Julia T. Alvarez, who is concurrently the Dominican Republic's Chief Representative at the UN Commission for Social Development, Mrs. Aliye Pekin Celik, from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and Professor Dianne Davis, founder of the NGO International Council for Caring Communities.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**